

MER Commander's Commentary December 2014

November was one of those months that simply flew by. I had the opportunity to represent all of you at my first CAP Senior Advisory meetings (CSAG) that occurred at national headquarters at Maxwell AFB in Alabama. All of the region commanders, the national commander, his vice commander and the national executive officer, as well as the CAP Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the CAP-USAF commander (plus numerous staff) met over two days covering a significant amount of material. The term "stuffing ten pounds of stuff into a five pound sack" came to mind after I saw the agenda for the two-day meeting.

Some important things that affect all of you included reviewing the FY 16 budget, discussing the process of how we will be making changes in regulations in the future. We reviewed the CAP glider program following a glider summit that was held at headquarters the day before the CSAG meeting. We had a very long discussion about recruiting and retention, Growing the Organization, for our members (more on this later). We talked about the CAP Foundation and Alumni Association. We also spent some time discussing aircraft utilization, assignments, and the future. We reviewed a previously issued document about duties of a region commander and a second one listing specific duties for wing commanders. We received a briefing on the cadet uniform program from cadet programs, the national cadet competition and the training plan for the new cadet protection policy. We had a detailed brief on changes to the new CAP safety program, which is geared to move away from "checking the box" to a more fundamental program geared on a strong safety culture and prevention. We talked about the CAP NCO program and what it can do to help you. The CSAG held an executive session where we discussed several items including some awards, and selected a member to represent CAP on the Board of Governors (BoG). There were also several other procedural items we discussed as well. The bottom line was, we got a lot accomplished in a very short period.

One of the procedural items we discussed was the announcement from the Speaker of the House's office that our WWII veterans will receive the Congressional Gold Medal at a ceremony of December 10th in the Capitol. Currently we estimate that there will be around 40 veterans there in person. Due to space limitations in the room itself the number of CAP members who can attend will be very limited. However, the ceremony will be shown on CSPAN at 1500 EST on the 10th so all of you can tune in to watch. Look for additional updates as we get closer to the date. A dinner will be held that evening in honor of our WWII service members and their families. This event also has a limit but we are working to open it up to as many CAP members as possible. Stay tuned for updates on this as well.

One topic that is on many of our minds as we look towards the future is how do we grow our organization? The briefing from our national staff on this was very enlightening. First off, our national retention rate for adult members is around 75% and for cadets it is around 50%. Both of these have remained somewhat constant over time. CAP has been doing exit surveys for several years and the number one thing that we can do as an organization to retain members is to have a quality program. This probably doesn't surprise many of you, but let's look at it a little deeper. CAP has a fairly robust training program for our units but it is often ignored or used sparingly. At times we bring in new members who "don't know what they don't know". If you are in a unit that does not have a schedule and a training plan looking out over months then you may be repeating the same mistakes that many have made over time. Sure, we all have unexpected things that come up that affect a schedule but when running your meetings is a seat of the pants decision made weekly or less you need to get some help. A number of our wings have a Group structure, some are smaller in size and only have a wing staff but all of them are there to help. While there are often friendly rivalries between local squadrons, most are more than willing to help their neighbor but you need to ask. I strongly encourage any adult member who has not attended Squadron Leadership School (SLS) to sign up for the next one. You will see how important you are to us and how you fit in. If you have been in more than six months this should be on your radar. Those running cadet programs should be attending the Training Leaders of Cadets (TLC)

course. Anyone interested in possibly becoming a commander one day should be looking at the Unit Commanders Course (UCC). All of these will help you to become a better leader.

Many of us spent the Thanksgiving holiday with our families and friends. We counted our blessings and gave thanks for them. One of the many things I have to be thankful for is you. We have close to 7,000 members in the Middle East Region. As of the end of November we continue, overall, to maintain a number that is slightly over 100% as compared to the last quarter and last year. CAP as a whole is slightly down and some of our wings are as well. You already make a difference but you could have a bigger impact. Over the next year we are not only celebrating our WWII vets but our birthday. CAP will be 75 years old. These two major milestones are opportunities for us to build and grow our organization. We do amazing things for our communities, states and our nation. We need to make this known. You deserve recognition for the difference you make. Whether it is performing a search and rescue mission, a counter drug, a disaster relief missions or homeland security mission, you are making a difference. Our cadet program defined STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) before it became a buzzword. We develop dynamic leaders for the future of our country. We give back across this great nation every day, 365 days a year. I am awed by what all of you do.

As we enter the last calendar month of the year let's stay focused on the future. I attended a wing conference this past month where some members wanted to spend time complaining about the past. Their complaints had some valid points and they were noted but we can't change the past. We can improve the future and learn from the past. We have to focus on the positive and be good leaders and followers. I am proud to serve as your region commander and I look forward to seeing some of you this month at the CGM awards, Wreaths Across America, and maybe at your local meeting. You never know!